



Lisa Kuffel

After passage of the First Step Act, Lisa Kuffel was granted compassionate release after serving 31 years of a 53-year sentence.

At 66, Lisa Kuffel does more in one day than many people half her age. Since she was released from prison in November 2020, Lisa's been working at the Salvation Army as a factory manager at their food distribution center. "I drive their truck, their forklift," she says. "I distribute food to poor and needy families."

It doesn't end there: Lisa also manages a sober living house, works for the Chamber of Commerce of the city of Lodi, California, and for the Lodi police department.

"They sponsor a lot of city events like farmer's market, chef cook-offs, street fairs. I'm on their event crew. For the police department, I man roadblocks and keeping traffic control. I've been doing that for now a year, and I really, really like it."



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Her enthusiasm for her new life is about as far from where she was in 1990, when she was given a 53-year sentence for committing four bank robberies while armed with a gun, all driven by her need to finance her fierce addiction to heroin. Behind bars, hope was in short supply, but eventually Lisa realized that she had to make something of herself. She started taking classes and focused on keeping her head down, programming, and her various jobs. But with passage of the First Step Act in 2018, Lisa decided to see for herself if she might qualify for early release.

“I quit my job at the commissary warehouse and I went to work in the law library. I figured I was the one who got myself into this mess, I need to get myself out of it. I learned the federal law, how to file papers, and I wrote my own motion, and I filed it.” She was denied, but then eventually granted compassionate release.

“I was released 16 years early, after serving 31 years. Now, every day is a blessing. Every single day that I'm out here and I'm not standing at four o'clock count, I'm just fascinated. I have my bank account, I have savings. I'm building my credit. My car is in my name. I just got internet at my house and I have a new laptop. All day, every day, is a real blessing.”

Lisa is in close touch with her family and is working hard to rebuild those relationships. “In October I'm going to take my first paid vacation ever. I'm flying to Tennessee to spend nine days with my brother.”

Lisa is well-known in her community for her successful reentry and her commitment to redemption. “People in Lodi, they know all about me. I've been at the Salvation Army since I've been out, both as a client when I first got out, and now as a staff member. I've told my story at a lot of benefit dinners and on Facebook, to make it known what the Salvation Army can do for





people. I've been met with such positivity and total faith and trust. I was just hugged by the lieutenant of the Lodi Police Department last week at work!"

Lisa has not forgotten the many women behind serving excessive sentences like hers. She uses that new laptop and internet to stay in touch with them, help them file paperwork, and hopefully see them get the early release and second chance that she did.

And her incredible new life doesn't mean she's forgotten how she ended up behind bars. "I have a lot of remorse for my crime. I took classes when I was in prison for victim impact. And even though I didn't know their names, I wrote letters to each of the bank tellers that I victimized. I couldn't send them, because I didn't know who those people were. But I wrote them anyhow, apologizing for putting the fear of God into them. Even though I never intended to hurt them, they did not know that at the time. I wish I could apologize to them personally.

"But my remorse has made me so aware of how I can be kind to others. And I really enjoy that aspect of my life. And I feed poor people and old people and kids, and that is very rewarding to me."